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A violinist by default

By Kavelle Anglin-Christie, Staff Reporter, Jamaica Gleaner

Mark Stevenson, one of Jamaica's top violinists, will perform at this year's Jamaican Independence Day Celebration at Phillips Park on Saturday.

Stevenson plays classical and jazz, but he specializes in a style he has dubbed 'reggae violin'.

Stevenson says he started playing the violin when he was younger because he wasn't good at sports.

Then again, he says he wasn't good at playing the violin either. But now he is one of the top violinists in Jamaica.

"I was excited about doing it. I said, 'okay, I can't play football, basketball and I can't run, so I may as well play the violin'. At the time when I started playing the violin, I really wasn't that good, so I had to work at it," he said.

Stevenson says his passion for music is not hereditary, because he and his cousin Ce'Cile, a DJ, are the only two in his family who are pursuing music as a career.

Stevenson, 28, attended the Belair Prep School in Manchester and that was where he decided to start playing the violin. That was 20 years ago. However, Mark has only been a professional violinist for five years.

"That's because I took 10 years to study and I had to get in a lot of the basics and I had to do a lot of exams. Simply because you play the violin doesn't make you a professional," he said.

He admits that going professional wouldn't have been as easy if he had not entered Traxx. This is a local show which showcases various musical acts.

Stevenson says his sound is



Photo by Norman Grindley

"I have toured in Europe and over there they love reggae violin," said Mark Stevenson.

called reggae violin, because he mostly plays reggae.

This must have been a difficult feat because there were not a lot of violinists in the industry while Stevenson was growing up, so he had to look up to vocalists instead.

"It's only now that I'm seeing a lot of violinists coming out of the woodwork, so they will have people to look up to now," he said.

And in the few years he has been in the music industry, he has been faced with many difficulties, although there have been sprinklings of rewards.

"Because there are not a lot of reggae violinists in the industry, at times it is very difficult. The engineers don't know how to mic a violin, because they are accustomed to violins being played in large halls and having natural acoustics.

Even abroad, it is the same thing. When you mic a violin, they say it is too loud, so they try to tone it down a lot," he said.

Apart from that, Stevenson says another strike against him is the cost to record a violin.

He says this is one of the reasons he hasn't been included on recent dancehall or reggae rhythms.

"The violin is usually the more expensive thing to record and it uses more studio time. Overseas it could go up to \$2,000 per hour, but most of those companies can afford to pay for it. But out here they prefer to just go on the computer and get the sounds there and that's why many of them end up with this off-key sounding thing," he said.

Because some record com-

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